

The Protestant Church is not a corporate body, but aggregate or an aggregate of several corporations the great head of which is Christ

There is a Corporate Church the head of which is the Pope, who as its head declares what is sin and who has sinned; but Christ alone as the Great Head of the Church aggregate can and does declare what sin is and who has sinned, and no man can or will presume to assume this power this divine right - if he does he is of that Corporate Church the Head of which is the Pope

Now I take it that this Church like others in our land is not a temporal but a spiritual ^{constitution} ~~Church~~, exercising its power only over sin; if it exercises it beyond this it is of the Romish Church. Its constitution or fundamental law is the New Testament, and all its laws regulations and concerns are founded on this perfect code of our Saviour, and whatever rule or article of faith or practice is inconsistent & incompatible with the New Testament is not binding or obligatory on the Church or its members.

This proposition is so much an axiom that it needs no demonstration, it is self evident to every Christian ^{and} ~~the~~ believer in the sacred writings of our Saviour.

Dr Beecher in his sermon delivered at the installation of Dr Cornelius says "the Church is a Society incorporated by the God of Heaven with specific privileges and their rights according to their conceptions of the Word of God"

Then if a Church in framing or compiling its articles of faith and practice should use any phraseology of doubtful interpretation or in the meaning of which its members differ in their opinion, the only interpreters and reliable source they can have for reconciling and settling this difference is the New Testament, and to this they must resort with prayerful hearts and investigating minds. Through the whole range of that Book there can not be found a requirement or a consideration for one tenth part of one income for the support of the gospel, or any rule by which we are to be called upon for our contributions to benevolent objects, or for the support of the Ministry except the law of love. Search the scriptures and no other rule can be found.

While Abraham & Jacob occasionally parted with a tenth part of their substance to the cause of their Master, and this practice finally became a Divine law for the Jewish Nation, it cannot be implied that this obligation rests on us. The old dispensation has been done away and this new one the New Testament took its place with Christ as its Author and expounder; and in vain will you look for any other condition of Communion and fellowship with the Church than what the New Testament has not enjoined as a condition of salvation. In vain will you look for any ground of exclusion or church censure which does not involve the essentials of Christianity. Throughout all this ^{perfect} code of action love and love only is the fulfillment of the law. No Inquisitorial power or coercive plan is there adopted, as in the civil law, for the exaction of any particular sum, or the adoption of any particular mode for the support of the ministry or any benevolent object. Covetousness which is idolatry is condemned. It is a sin.

In the days of Peter and the Apostles the people sold their possessions and laid the prices of the things sold at the Apostles

feet as free will offerings. So did Ananias and Sapphira and his wife sell all their possessions, but brought only a part of the avails and lied at the Apostles feet; and they were condemned not for keeping back a part, but for the deceit, the lie they were guilty of, for they would have the Apostles believe that it was the price of all the sale.

The rebuke of Peter was, "was it not thine own? and after it was sold was it not in thine own power?" clearly implying that what they parted with was, or ought to be a free will offering and not to claim like others they had given all, while deceitfully and perhaps guagingly they had given only half — which was the sin.

Any obligatory method to be adopted by a Church to constrain its Members to pay any certain amount for the support of her ministrations is opposed to the Spirit of the gospel, which requires throughout all its precepts, commands and instructions that the Christians aid in support of religion be voluntary.

It is also opposed to the example of Christ and his Apostles who although ~~they~~ always inculcating the maxim that

"they which preached the gospel should live of the gospel"; maintained with equal force, that contributions for religious purposes should proceed from the heart and be a free will offering unto the Lord.

Will a Protestant Church in this land of civil, and we ought to believe of religious freedom, say that any one of its members refusing to have his solvency or insolvency ascertained or his property or ability estimated and directly taxed by its majority, commits sin? If so it declares with the Pope what sin it is and leaves it not ~~with~~ to God and his Word. — If a church cannot assume this Popish and despotic power, by what authority does she say to its members you are not, but we are the sole judges of your temporal or monetary matters, and we create our own test to judge of your ability to render services or to pay for the support of the gospel, under the pains of censure or excommunication.

If there are any who would censure or cast out any of their brethren for the purpose of feeling themselves at liberty in this manner to judge them, let them first judge their own selves, and deliberately and solemnly in the presence of their Judge

enquire whether no spirit of vindictiveness
has unconsciously mingled itself with
their zeal against sin.

I know the spiritual power of
the Church is useful as the means of last
resort, but that power can only be exercised
against sin, and not against a difference
of judgment of its members; but when the
censure falls on those who are sustained by
conscientious integrity, and more especially
when they are fortified by the approving
sentiments of community or a respectable
portion of it around them — when the
voice is regarded not as the voice of God
or his appointed agent, but only of a party,
how weak then powerless it becomes.

Wesley says — "Is thy heart right
with God? If it be give me thy hand. I
do not mean be of my opinion, you need
not. Neither do I mean I will be of your
opinion; I cannot. Let all opinions
alone, only give me thy hand".

Dr Porter says — "Neither differences on
questions of reform, modes of doing good
or any other subject which does not involve
the essentials of Christianity can warrantably
be a ground of exclusion".

7
Robert Hall declared "That no set of men are entitled to prescribe as an indispensable condition of communion what the New Testament has not enjoined as a condition of salvation."

An eminent Divine of the present day remarks that "The Gospel of Christ is a free gospel, and no Church can or ought to dictate the mode, or amount that its Members shall pay for the support of that gospel. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?" to his own Master he standeth or falleth".

Doct Schumaker in his Elements of Popular Theology says - "In Europe the salaries of Ministers are raised by a tax on the people. This is in direct opposition to the spirit of the gospel, which requires that our aid of Religion be voluntary - "It is opposed moreover to ^{the example of} Christ & his Apostles who thought they maintained that those who preached the gospel should live of the gospel, inculcated with equal force the maxim that contributions for religious purposes must proceed from a willing heart, and be a free will offering to the Lord

8
"It destroys one of the strongest safe guards
"of the liberty of the people. If they have
"lost confidence in their minister and
"yet cannot prove any overt act against
"him so as to remove him by course of
"discipline, they need but withhold their
"support, and as a matter of necessity he
"must either change his conduct to acquire
"their confidence or must seek his breed
"elsewhere".

Rev John Harris in his prize essay
(Museum) under the topic what proportion
of income Christians ought to give for the
support of the gospel or charitable uses
says. "The Gospel of Christ in harmony
"with its great design of establishing a
"reign of love, leaves its followers to aposep
"themselves — It puts into their hands
"indeed a claim upon their property but
"leaves the question how much? to be
"determined by themselves — In assisting
"them to fill up the blank with the proper
"assortment, the only step which it takes is
"to point them to the cross of Christ."

Not only these but the authority and opinion
of many other eminent divines, and

9

Christians of the present and past ages
might be added to that of the Great Law Giver,
clearly showing that no claim of the church for
an assement of the property of its members
for its support, no call for any object of
benevolence can or ought to be enforced by
any censure, or course of discipline delegated
to it by the Gospel, but on the contrary such
a course would be opposed to the Spirit, and
that reign of love recognized & enforced in
that Sacred Book —

No authority can be produced no instance
cited in this country, it is believed, where the
Church has assumed this right, and then
power and attempted to maintain it against
the protestation of its members. On the
contrary in this and in our Sister States
whenever this assumed right has been denied
it has been surrendered by the Church to
the voluntary principle and each one
left to assess himself individually or
by a voluntary association —

The Christian alone and not a
collective Church is competent to make
the graduated scale for his gifts and for
his dues to gospel support, he alone can
conscientiously and with judgment

consider his means and his ability for the aid of the ministry or for the furtherance of any gospel enterprise. The Church cannot and will not assume to be the Keeper of his judgment and conscience, and set up an inquisitorial censures to ascertain his reasonable wants for the support of ~~the~~ a family — for the calls of education — sickness — and to discharge those natural and moral obligations which some are under more than others to extend pecuniary relief not only to those of their own household, but to Kinsmen and to friends.

The living law of love, and duty, written in the heart, will operate more powerfully, and successfully ~~than~~ in supporting the Ministry at home, in building up the Church of Christ and extending his holy religion every where, than all the sumptuary laws, and ecclesiastical edicts which were ever enacted in this or the Mother Country to enforce man to his religious duty, or restrain him from the violation of the commandment of his God & Saviour.

A further view of this subject might be taken in reference to the practical

11
effects that this system of coercion may and
does have on the harmony and spiritual
growth of the Church, as well as ^{in reference to} that principle
of justice to our fellow beings which ought
to be assumed as the basis of all our gifts
and considerations for this and every other
object in life - But the writer believes this
part of the Subject addresses itself so clearly
to the reason and common sense of every
man, that his attention need only ~~be~~ be
called to it to convince him that where
there is constraint, there is no harmony,
and where there is no harmony, there is
no spiritual growth in a Church; that
the Lord hates the Patron of his holy cause
when that patronage proceeds from the
injury of the rights of others, or the
withholding of those dues which the
laws of the land would assign to them.

W. S. Livingston

Argument and

Prize 1848

upon the Slave Trade